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PP RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHKB #1215 2291052  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 171052Z AUG 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1054  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS BAKU 001215

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SENSITIVE  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
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KMDR  
SUBJECT: IRANIAN AMBASSADOR SPEAKS OUT ON THE MIDDLE EAST  
CRISIS

REF: BAKU 762

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¶1. (U) In recent statements - notably on widely watched independent ANS Television - outspoken Iranian Ambassador to Azerbaijan Afshar Suleymani repeatedly accused Israel of using excessive force and criticized the United States for its support of this "injustice" in the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Suleymani dismissed all claims that Iran has provided Hezbollah with weapons or technical support, claims he says are being used to create the impression that Hezbollah is supported only by Iran (Sueymani claims Hezbollah is supported only by God ad the Lebanese people). Furthermore, he repeatedly asserted that Israel is attempting to exploit he situation in Lebanon - with the full support f the U.S. - in order to exert pressure on Iran nd its nuclear program. Suleymani called upon al Muslims to resist the "Zionists" and to condemn America's support for Israel's offensive. As always, Suleymani, an ethnic Azeri, made all of these remarks in fluent Azerbaijani.

¶2. (U) During a 21 July appearance on ANS Television, Suleymani went out of his way to stress Iranian and Azerbaijani "brotherhood and friendship," a theme throughout this crisis. When asked to comment on a hypothetical question posed by Israeli Ambassador Artur Lenk concerning what Azerbaijan would do if Iran attacked Lenkoran (a southern Azerbaijani city near the Iranian frontier), Suleymani said "Iran and Azerbaijan are friends and brothers...we are neighbors...let them not create such disagreements between us."

¶3. (U) Suleymani used a August 14 appearance on ANS Television not only to repeatedly criticize Israel and the U.S. over Lebanon (despite the recently implemented cease fire between Israel and Hezbollah), but to threaten further instability in the region. Asked whether or not he thought the Middle East crisis was over, Suleymani stated that it would not be concluded soon and threatened that "new conflicts could easily emerge." When asked to elaborate on this point, Suleymani avoided the question and returned to his previous calls for Muslim solidarity in the face of U.S. and Israeli attempts to "oppress" the Islamic World.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Suleymani actively engages the local press, utilizing his fluent Azerbaijani, in order to get out the Iranian message. He has been more active than usual in recent weeks, and his comments have closely mirrored those made by Iranian President Ahmadinejad. Other points of view

on the conflict - including our own and those of the Israeli Ambassador to Azerbaijan - have also received wide airing in the Azerbaijani media. While Suleymani may be trying to stir up anti-U.S. feelings in the context of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict, we have not seen evidence that his efforts have been successful. Post will continue to monitor closely public reaction to the Middle East crisis. END COMMENT.  
HYLAND